

We arrived in Wahlenbergfjord on board a Norwegian research vessel at the end of June. Unfortunately as the fjord was still choked with ice we were put ashore on a small island in the mouth of the fjord. The wealth of bird life, however, was remarkable for an island nearly on the 80th parallel. It was not long before we discovered that this abnormally high concentration of birds was also appreciated by some Arctic foxes that had got stranded on the island.

Whenever ice and weather conditions permitted we searched the cliffs of the fjord for possible Ivory Gull colonies. After three weeks we found a colony of about 35 pairs at the top of a thousand foot cliff. The only means of watching the gulls was from the top of the cliff so we had to set up camp on the plateau above.

Our efforts were well rewarded as the Ivory Gull proved to be an extremely interesting as well as beautiful bird. Cliff-nesting in this species appears to be a comparatively new habit. There are scarcely any adaptations in the breeding behaviour to cliff-nesting as there are in the Kittiwake. Nevertheless the Ivory Gulls' behaviour is interesting. Head-tossing, which in most gulls is only performed in courtship and as a food-begging movement by the juveniles is also performed by the Ivory as appeasement after a hostile clash. Not all the other postures can be readily homologised with those in other gulls which indicates that the Ivory Gull is taxonomically distinct.

Since most eggs hatched around the end of July and beginning of August we were only able to measure the incubation period for one egg which was laid the day after our arrival at the colony; the period was 24 to 25 days. A clutch size of two eggs is most common; however there are indications that this may vary from year to year according to the amount of food available.

At the beginning of August we left our colony for a few days in order to explore the head of the fjord where another colony had been reported. This colony was deserted, however. There seems to be little doubt that the Ivory Gull is decreasing in numbers. This is probably because the ice caps are gradually receding so that the Ivories are being exposed to increased competition from other gulls and increased predation from the Arctic fox.

We left Wahlenbergfjord in the middle of August just before the ice closed in again.

Details of our results on the breeding biology of the Ivory Gull can be found in *British Birds* 52: 105-114 and on the breeding behaviour in *Ardea* 47: 157-176.

## Some Notes on the Breeding of the Desert Bullfinch (*Rhodospiza Sharp* 1888) in Israel

by MR. H. HOVEL

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The interesting Desert Bullfinch, *Rhodospiza obsoleta* Sharp, seems to have occurred rather sporadically in the past. Hartert<sup>1</sup> gives Palestine (Israel and Jordan of today) and Syria as the westerly boundary of its distribution. Aharoni<sup>2</sup> described it 35 years ago as breeding in the Dead Sea depression and along the Euphrates, also arriving "in winter in tens of thousands and filling almost every orchard and grove around Jaffa . . ."

Bodenheimer<sup>3</sup> confirmed it as an irregular winter visitor only and it would seem that invasions have ceased for at least the past 15–20 years. In the Natural History Department of Tel-Aviv University I have seen some mounted specimens which had been purchased in invasion years from Arabs, who caught them in winter for cage birds.

In April 1958, I was fortunate to find a very isolated colony of this species breeding about 15 kilometres north-west of Beersheba, Israel. The colony was nesting in acacia bushes beside the road and extended over about a mile. Beyond this the bushes held no nests, although conditions were exactly the same.

The nests were situated mostly at a height of 1.5–2.0 metres above ground level, but I also found two nests in the tops of young eucalyptus trees, 3.5–4.0 metres high. The colony consisted of about 100–150 nests and the birds were surprisingly tame, the sitting females waiting almost to arm's length before slipping away. The eggs, 5–7 in number were pale greenish-white with small red dots and blotches. Both the birds and the eggs corresponded in size to the Greenfinch, *Chloris chloris*. The males remained mostly near the nest site during incubation, singing in a very peculiar, soft, melodious tone.

This colony seemingly succeeded in raising young and in August I saw small flocks of young in the vicinity. In the winter they disappeared, but in the spring of 1959 they were back, breeding in exactly the same area. The nest was chiefly lined with cotton and it is of interest that cotton plantations are a recent agricultural development here, existing only for the past two or three years, but gradually extending.

So far, this is the only confirmed breeding colony found in the country. This interesting record is all the more remarkable since the species was not even known as a winter visitor to the country during the past 15 years.

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References:—

<sup>1</sup> E. Hartert, "*Vogel der Palearkt. Fauna*", (1912–1938), Vol. I, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> J. Aharoni, "*Torat hecha'y*" (in Hebrew), Vol. I, p. 166. 1923.

<sup>3</sup> S. Bodenheimer, "*Animal Life in Palastine*", p. 158. 1935.

## Notes on some Philippine Tailor-birds

by DR. KENNETH C. PARKES

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The taxonomy of the group of Philippine tailor-birds assigned by Delacour and Mayr (1946) to the species *Orthotomus atrogularis* has not yet been fully worked out. Particularly intriguing is the status of the two Luzon forms, *derbianus* Moore and *chloronotus* Ogilvie-Grant. Delacour and Mayr list both as subspecies of *O. atrogularis*, but the line between the ranges of the two is not as simple as they indicate, and it is highly possible that the two forms may prove to be sympatric in parts of central Luzon.

Peters (1939: 110) believed this group of tailor-birds to be closely allied to, and possibly conspecific with, *O. sericeus*, but omitted any mention of *O. atrogularis* in his discussion of relationships. I agree with Delacour and Mayr that this group of subspecies is better placed with *atrogularis*. Nominate *atrogularis* has a green tail, while in *sericeus* and its races the